

1. Descriptive Information

<p>Writing for Equity: Practical Guidance</p> <p>Even the most thoughtfully conducted research can be harmful if communicated poorly or misinterpreted. How we communicate about underrepresented populations matters, and hands-on opportunities to practice thoughtful non-oppressive communication are rare.</p> <p>This affinity discussion will build on the September 2019 Professional Development workgroup presentation on Equitable Research Reporting. Facilitators will share five guidelines on how to write equitably, grounding the conversation in guiding principles for conducting equitable research.</p> <p>Participants will engage in a discussion on their own experiences, challenges, and successes in conducting and communicating research equitably. While this discussion has been designed by and for researchers, the guidelines can be applied to any form of communication.</p>	<p>Facilitators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Esther Gross, Child Trends• Jenita Parekh, Child Trends <p>Scribe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nicole Wright, ICF
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2. Documents Available on Website

- Writing for Equity: Practical Guidance

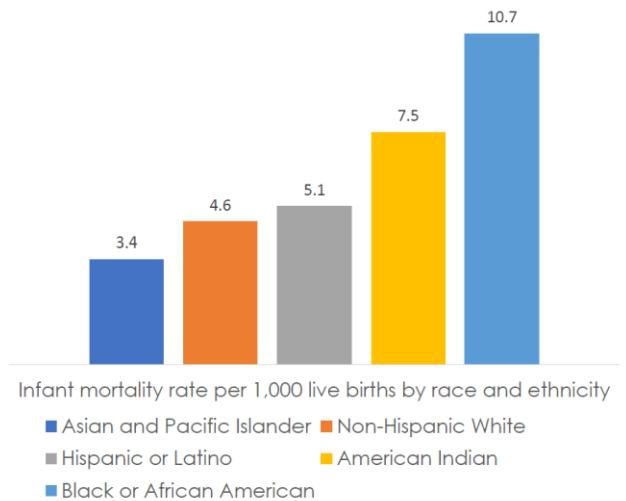
3. Brief Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Esther Gross and Jenita Parekh
 - Esther Gross is a researcher at Child Trends. Her work focuses on advancing equity through research and the communication of research. Her experience is primarily centered on the child welfare field, but more and more has been applied to child care and early education. Equity work spans topic areas.
 - Dr. Jenita Parekh’s work is focused on implementing and evaluating evidence-based programs related to adolescent sexual health. She is a lead trainer for community partners on data collection and program observation, focused on ensuring that an equity lens is applied to each stage of the research process, as opposed to communication and dissemination, which is Esther’s focus. Jenita also brings a strong background in implementation and evaluation research.
- Today’s presentation covers six guidelines, developed by and for researchers, but applicable outside research as well, even to day-to-day communication. The presenters plan to hold a lot of time to practice and apply these guidelines, as well as time for discussion and sharing resources.
- The first poll was launched to learn more about who is “in the room.” The poll results showed about 40% researcher/evaluator, 20% state representative or policymaker, 7% federal representative or policy maker, and 9% TA provider. 22% said they would describe their role as “something else” (consultant, analyst, student, trainer, administrator, and QRIS were all mentioned).
- Esther introduced the first key concept: equity.
 - Equity is both a process and an outcome – the condition we will achieve when personal characteristics outside our control (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, class) no longer predict how we fare. As a process, equity is about the steps we take to achieve this outcome.
 - The guidance presented today originated in research, so it is important to talk about where it fits in research as a whole.
- Jenita then discussed what equity is in the context of research.
 - Regardless of your position, it is important to understand the role of researchers in advancing equity: documenting disparities, identifying underlying causes, and proposing solutions.

- Considering historical and lived realities is crucial in research. Integrating racial equity into research is more likely to lead to accurately presenting findings, providing policymakers with the most complete information to better address factors that perpetuate inequity.
- Esther provided an example (below) to illustrate why equitably communicating data and research is important.

- In 2018, the U.S. infant mortality rate was 5.7 deaths per 1000 live births (see graph to the right). Disaggregated by race and ethnicity, we see that black babies are over twice as likely to die as white babies.
- But this is not enough – without context, one is left to interpret the information by oneself. This issue could be about education and access to pre-natal care – but research shows that these disparities remain even when controlling for access to prenatal care, education, and even income.
- The most likely driver of disparities has to do with chronic stress and weathering, i.e., the impact of chronic stress on the body from experiencing racism.
- It is also important to consider the way we talk about this issue. We don't want to lose the nuances in the data (e.g., Asian and Pacific Islander infants have a lower rate than White infants, but if you broke apart Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, their rates would look similar to American Indian infants. We would also see differences if we broke out Asian and Hispanic or Latino by country of origin. Talking about “closing the gaps” between infant mortality rates, can imply that Black, indigenous, and people of color should aspire to whiteness. It also ignores the fact that White infants in the U.S. experience worse outcomes than infants in many other countries). We want to get these rates to zero for everyone and communicating data equitably is part of how we get there.

Figure 1: Infant mortality by race and ethnicity



- **Guiding Principles:**

1. Examine our own backgrounds and biases.
 2. Commit to digging deeper into the data.
 3. Recognize that the research process itself impacts people and communities; researchers play a role in ensuring that their research benefits communities.
 4. Engage communities as partners in research and credit them for their contribution (and compensate them for their time).
 5. Guard against the implied or explicit assumption that white is the normative, standard, or default position.
- These guidelines were informed by researchers, funders, policymakers, existing tools and resources in the field, and experience. They serve as the basis of recommendations for adopting a racial equity approach at different phases of the research process, which Jenita outlined next.
 - Stages of the Research Process (and questions researchers should ask themselves to incorporate this lens into each stage):
 - Landscape – Who has the power? What power differentials exist within the community?
 - Design – What measures do you have that examine root causes?
 - Data Collection – How does the community like to share/give information?
 - Data Analysis – How do community stakeholders interpret the data, and how does this differ or align with researchers’ interpretations?
 - Dissemination – Where do community stakeholders want to see this data go? What are their next steps?
 - This (how we report data) is the primary focus of today’s presentation.

- **Six Guidelines on Equitable Writing**
- These guidelines are distinct from the Guiding Principles, but in alignment – they are more specific to the writing process.
- Esther posed another polling question to the group: Does your organization have guidance on equitable communication or writing?
- 54% said no, 20% said yes, and 26% were unsure.
- The guidelines are as follows:
 - Say what you mean
 - Use person-centered language
 - Do not assume there will be differences
 - Include context on structural inequity early
 - Be aware of attributing value and stigma
 - Center the voices of the people who are impacted
- Esther then asked they group what they are most interested in learning from today’s presentation. Responses included: language to use (and not to use), concrete writing tips and tools, how to implement the guidelines, evidence of effectiveness, voice and tone, incorporating context based on inequity early, including voices of impacted communities, examples of common mistakes, cultural norms in academic research that we should alter in our writing that we may not be aware of, and engaging communities.
- Esther walked the group through each of the guidelines:
- *Say what you mean*
 - Whenever Esther sees the word “diverse,” she recommends instead precisely defining the population and avoiding euphemisms. If you don’t know, say you don’t know.
 - Be explicit about the norm – if you’re talking about a normative group, name them.
 - Think about who you are making visible and invisible – don’t say “diverse children,” if you really mean “children who identify as Hispanic/Latino.”
- *Use person-centered language*
 - Some communities prefer identity-first language, others do not – center the community and respect what the population would consider an identity. If so, how would they identify themselves?
 - The key is to avoid labeling individuals with their circumstances.
 - If there is disagreement in the community/population, you can use both or explain your choice.
- *Do not assume that there will be differences*
 - Avoid reifying socially constructed categories by not assuming differences between groups.
 - Be aware that measurement instruments might have been tested with some populations and not others.
 - Structural discrimination against targeted groups can result in differences due to other characteristics.
 - Ask how we picked the groups we’re comparing. Could differences be explained by measurement error or a correlated characteristic (e.g., income)?
- *Include context on structural inequity early*
 - For example, right after you note a disparity – investigate structural explanations, not just individual. Ask yourself:
 - Did I provide the reader with sufficient context to interpret this finding?
 - How could this finding be misinterpreted?
 - It is important to include context on inequity in all sections and be clear when information that could have added context was not measured.
- *Be aware of attributing value and stigma*
 - Interpretation of findings is subjective – ask whether the research supports a positive or negative value for this finding.
 - Ex: White teachers were more likely to say that early care and education was their calling, whereas Black teachers were more likely to say they wanted to help families or needed the paycheck. What does this imply? Do we have research that says how people “should” describe their motivation?

- Rewrite to say something like, “motivations for working in the ECE field varied by racial/ethnic identity. There is limited research on how these motivations impact children’s outcomes.”
- *Center community voice*
 - Qualitative data can lift up voices of communities who are impacted. One way to do this is actually use community members’ words when possible to help illustrate your points (quotes).
 - Actively engage community stakeholders in interpreting, understanding, and framing.
 - Ask yourself, do your words shift, change, or dilute original intentions/words? How would a community member describe what is happening?
- **Questions from the audience:**
- Q: When thinking about person-centered language, what is your best advice to discover the preferred choice in representation?
 - A (Esther): If you are talking to one person, just ask – what do you use, and would you like me to use the same? Or look at language used by researchers with that particular identity – see how they describe themselves in written documents. There are also organizations that publish guidelines about best practices re: language. If it’s still unclear, and you can’t reach out to stakeholders, be intentional about your language, and explain why you chose it.
- Q: What kind of responses have you seen to publications following these guidelines?
 - A (Jenita): Usually a lightbulb goes off and people seem excited. Overall, I’ve seen very positive responses, but still somewhat to be determined because the guidance is still relatively new.
 - A(Esther): When writing for an academic journal, some tweaks are very subtle and just best practices in research with a different lens (e.g., being honest about limitations). But in terms of impact, we will have to see how it goes in the future.
- Q: Could these be considered more of a "template," and depending on the community, issue, or context, the guidelines could be adapted and customized for specific purposes, communities, or issues?
 - A (Esther): Absolutely yes – this is not prescriptive or the “end all, be all.” This is to get the wheels turning and personalize depending on the context/community you’re working in. I wanted to point out common themes that are applicable in most scenarios, but I could add more guidelines depending on the population.
- **Group Activity on Applying the Guidelines**
- **Example 1:** Children in U.S. born families are less likely to be in low-income working families than their foreign-born counterparts.
 - Are we saying what we mean?
 - We should start by defining all terms, including “low-income,” “foreign-born,” and “counterparts.”
 - Ask ourselves: Are we using person-centered language? Is this something that could be considered stigmatizing? What is the reasoning behind presenting the findings?
- Suggestions for revision:
 - Add context, including challenges associated with employment and immigration status, qualifications transitioning to the US workforce.
- **Example 2:** People of color and immigrant ECE providers are more likely to have a state certificate and less likely to have a bachelor’s degree than their White, US born counterparts.
 - Consider:
 - What is meant by people of color? Who are we talking about specifically?
 - Language “immigrant ECE providers” is not person-centered.
 - Statement uses White as the point of comparison.
 - The assumption is that a BA yields better outcomes for children – the field has not decided on the value of a degree (additionally, does it matter what the BA is in?)
 - We need to address the language issue – courses may not be available in other languages.
 - Many immigrants are white, so this language is conflicting.

- The statement implies bias of dominant groups and suggests academia is the only valid way to gain expertise.

4. Brief Summary of Discussion

Poll question for the audience: Which guideline most resonated with you?

- Largest proportion (42%) said “including context on structural inequity early.” This was followed by “be aware of attributing value and stigma” (25%) and “use person-centered language” (22%).

Question for the group: What was the most challenging part of this exercise? Responses included:

- Writing concisely, yet equitably
- Putting aside my own biases
- Precise language that is concise and accessible
- Deconstructing habits/preconceived notions of how to write to better include equity in writing
- Incorporating this into in-progress work
- Fitting the guidelines into plain language writing
- Identifying “mistakes” in the examples, but not knowing what to put in its place
- Adopting guidelines without turning off audience
- Vagueness is a source of protection for academic institutions – it can take more courage than an institution is willing to put forward to be this specific
- Engaging stakeholders in the process

Resources shared with the group include:

- *A guide to incorporating a racial and ethnic equity perspective throughout the research process*, by Jenita Parekh, Shantai Peckoo, and Kristine Andrews
<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/a-guide-to-incorporating-a-racial-and-ethnic-equity-perspective-throughout-the-research-process>
- *Equitable Research Communication Guidelines*, by Esther Gross
<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/equitable-research-communication-guidelines>

- Alan Guttman: One person in an earlier conversation mentioned the idea of “undoing white supremacy” – to me, you can’t undo white supremacy without going to a deep, internal level – you have to internalize the guidelines and principles. We’re not going as far as we need to go.
Esther: Everyone needs to examine their own biases and recognize what they bring to the work. If all we fix is the writing, that would be a disservice.
- Esther: For those who said in the beginning of the presentation that they were unsure about guidance at their organization or that they do have guidance – has your answer to this question changed? What are your thoughts on what it covers as opposed to this guidance?
Anonymous comment: I’m going to be very frank here. I’m white. I honestly feel like I’m damned if I do and damned if I don’t. I try to be respectful of everyone that I have contact with and treat everyone as an individual. I’m sure that I am an equal opportunity offender.
- Esther: Identity is very complex – all of us hold power in some ways and less power in other ways – and this is very challenging work. It’s tough to recognize that we don’t have to fix this overnight. Incremental work matters and trying matters. And it’s okay to mess up sometimes. My favorite poet, Sarah Kay, says “I’m always trying to learn how to hold myself gently and also hold myself accountable and do the same for others around me.” It’s important to ground this work in compassion for others and for ourselves.
Esther: It is also important to remember that none of us chose this – I can confidently say that none of us chose to inherit the identity and situation we’re in.
- Matt Fraser: Before I begin, I may end up answering my own question. I work for a subsidy program for childcare within the state of Wisconsin. I work on writing policy for this program. We are trying to look at our policy to write from an equity and inclusion perspective. We don’t really have our own data that says our policies are leading to inequitable outcomes. Do you think that we’re kind of trying to go at it backwards to try to write equitably in our policy before we have data showing inequitable outcomes as a result of our policies?

- Esther: In terms of writing policy, do we need proof of the inequity before we start working on it? I would say that it's not unreasonable to assume that outcomes are inequitable— you do not have to show all of the proof before you start the work. Additionally, we want outcomes for all children to be centered in equity, so it's reasonable to start with centering equity even if we haven't shown proof of inequitable outcomes directly resulting from a policy. There may also be research you can draw upon from your state, or other states that give reason to believe that the outcomes are inequitable.

5. Summary of Key Issues Raised

- Many people expressed a desire to see an example of a work product that is very intentional about this issue. Esther will think about good examples to share and follow up with authors about whether it is okay to share their work as an example. There may also be shorter research pieces (e.g., blog posts) that would also be good to share.